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EIA in Brazil: a procedures–practice gap. A comparative study with reference to the European Union, and especially the UK.

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Description / Abstract

Environmental impact assessment (EIA) is now established in many countries of the developed and developing world. EIA systems do, however, vary greatly in procedures and practice. Some countries have clear regulations, others have guidance, others have more ad hoc procedures. Those with well-established procedures may not necessarily be those with the most well-established practice. This can be a particular problem in the less developed countries, and this article explores and seeks to explain the nature of the EIA procedures–practice gap in Brazil. The institutional framework for EIA in Brazil reveals a system that is highly centralised and without the local basis that could improve its effectiveness. The key EIA legislation (CONAMA Resolution 001/86) has many strengths, but also some key weaknesses. There are considerable variations in implementation between the richer and poorer states of the country and there are some examples of good practice (especially in the southern and southeastern states). However, there are problematic links with planning procedures, a lack of secondary regulations, and very few trained and skilled personnel and material resources. There are weaknesses in the EIA process, and the EIS approval procedure is very bureaucratic and easily derailed by political and economic pressures. The relative strengths and weaknesses of the Brazilian EIA system are highlighted through a comparison with EU/UK practice, using a checklist approach. The article concludes with some pointers to the future for the EIA system in Brazil.

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